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PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT IN THE EAST ASIA AND PAKISTAN REGION AND CHINA

The present document analyses major new trends and developments of UNICEF programme cooperation in the East Asia and Pakistan region and China during 1990.

The UNICEF regional office has responsibility for UNICEF cooperation in the following countries and territories: Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam and the countries in the Pacific region (Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu). The UNICEF office at Beijing is responsible for programme cooperation in China.

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I. EAST ASIA AND PAKISTAN REGION

A. Regional overview

1. Over the last decade, most developing countries of the East Asia and Pakistan region have shown a high level of political commitment to improving services to children and women. During 1990, this led to continued improvements in their health and educational status. However, economic instability exacerbated by the Persian Gulf crisis, together with rapid urbanization, increased numbers of female-headed households, environmental degradation and inequity in access to services pose serious challenges for the future.

2. Economic growth has been strong in many countries. The Thai economy achieved an annual growth rate of 11.7 per cent during the 1987-1989 period. Malaysia had 7.6 per cent growth for 1989 and the Republic of Korea anticipates 9.7 per cent growth for 1990. The Lao People's Democratic Republic, Pakistan and Viet Nam all recorded growth rates of over 5 per cent for 1989. Rapid increases in agricultural output in Bangladesh have led to significant economic recovery and to gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 5.5 per cent for 1990 compared to 2 per cent per annum for the previous two years.

3. Inflation continues to be a major problem in the region. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Viet Nam, it was reported at between 40 and 70 per cent for 1989-1990. Because of the crisis in the Persian Gulf, most other countries are beginning to experience severe inflationary pressures. Those likely to be most severely affected are Bangladesh, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines and Viet Nam.

4. External debt and debt servicing remain major concerns in the region. The Philippines continues to pay over 40 per cent of its national budget for debt servicing, although in 1990, the level of debt was reduced from $29 billion to $27.2 billion through debt restructuring. Myanmar continues to experience high levels of debt and limited access to bilateral donor assistance.

5. Despite economic growth in much of the region and overall improvements in children's and women's health and educational status, income distribution and access to services remain highly inequitable, with disproportionate numbers of women and children among the poorest of the poor. Although per capita income has risen in Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand, the number of very poor households has increased significantly, and the lowest income groups have been unable to improve their quality of life.

B. Programme progress and trends

Child survival and development priorities

6. There have been considerable improvements in child survival and development in the region, with all countries reporting increased immunization coverage with anti-tuberculosis vaccine, three doses of combined diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus vaccine, three doses of oral polio vaccine, two doses of tetanus toxoid vaccine and measles vaccine. The availability and use of oral rehydration salts (ORS) has increased throughout the region, with several countries becoming self-sufficient in ORS production. Safe motherhood policies have been initiated in almost all countries in the region. Infant mortality rates (IMRs) continued to decline, with the Republic of Korea reducing its IMR to 10 per 1,000 live births, a rate lower than that of some developed nations.

7. Universal child immunization (UCI) has now been reached by the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, Viet Nam, the Marshall Islands and five other Pacific island nations. Malaysia is close to reaching the target, and Pakistan was making great efforts to achieve UCI by the end of 1990. Impressive improvements in coverage under the expanded programme on immunization (EPI) were noted in Bangladesh, and improvements were also noted in Cambodia, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. Almost all countries in the region have strengthened their health delivery systems through immunization programmes, thus presenting potential opportunities for the implementation of other maternal and child health (MCH) programmes in the coming years.

8. All countries in the region have now initiated programmes for the control of diarrhoeal diseases (CDD), which undertake training in case management, programme management and supervision, research into access and use of ORS, production and supply of ORS and information, education and communication support for CDD. UNICEF has also supported the establishment of diarrhoea training units. Attempts are being made throughout the region to integrate CDD activities within broader MCH and water supply and sanitation initiatives. In Pakistan, the national diarrhoea treatment policy emphasizes prevention through the promotion of breast-feeding, measles immunization and hygiene education.

9. Access to ORS has improved in most countries and it is estimated that ORS is available to 65 per cent of households in the region - a dramatic increase from 5 per cent in 1982. The overall rate of usage is still low, however.

10. Acute respiratory infections (ARI) are the leading cause of morbidity and mortality in the region, accounting for 25 per cent of all deaths of children under the age of five years. Approximately 40 per cent of all paediatric hospital consultations and 10 per cent of hospital admissions are ARI-related.

11. Programmes for the prevention and control of ARI are in progress in Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar,

Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam and are now expanding rapidly. In the Philippines, it was planned to "go to scale" during 1990. In Thailand, the programme has expanded from 13 to 35 provinces, and in Viet Nam, the programme now reaches 37 provinces.

Nutrition

12. The rate of malnutrition among children is declining slowly in most countries in the region. In the Philippines, the percentage of underweight schoolchildren was reduced from 17.2 per cent in 1982 to 13.9 per cent in 1990. Thailand reduced the rate of protein-energy malnutrition among infants and young children from 51 per cent in 1982 to 20 per cent in 1989.

13. Throughout 1990, the major nutritional activities were growth monitoring, community nutrition education and the promotion of breast-feeding and national and household food security. Family food production, using bio-intensive methods, is being extensively practised in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Philippines, the countries of the Pacific and Viet Nam. Throughout the region considerable work has yet to be undertaken on the establishment of food and nutrition surveillance systems.

14. Growth monitoring and promotion remain an important focus of most nutrition programmes. On the other hand, the prevention and control of micronutrient deficiencies such as iodine deficiency disorders and vitamin A deficiencies also continue to be a priority. Treatment with high-potency vitamin A has been in progress in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Federated States of Micronesia and Viet Nam.

Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS)

15. The number of people infected with acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) increased dramatically in the region over the last year. There are 146 reported cases of full-blown AIDS in the region. In August 1989, 9,473 cases of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) had been reported for the region, but by August 1990, the figure had escalated to 20,604. The actual number of persons infected with HIV is known to be much higher than officially reported. Regional projections for the year 2000 suggest an infection level of 1.5 million people. The pattern of transmission is changing rapidly from homosexual men and intravenous drug users to heterosexual females, thus increasing the risks of perinatal AIDS. Most countries in the region have implemented short-term plans of action with assistance from various donors.

Safe motherhood, family planning and birth spacing

16. Although progress has been made throughout the region in improving maternal health, maternal mortality rates (MMRs) in South-East Asia remain high at 420 per 100,000 live births. Safe motherhood programmes have been initiated in Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. In recognition of the fact that safe motherhood involves socio-economic and

cultural factors, interventions to promote safe motherhood have expanded to include female literacy and employment opportunities, as well as training for traditional birth attendants (TBAs).

Women's activities

17. UNICEF continued to support programmes of direct benefit to women and the integration of women's concerns into other sectoral programmes. Women's income-generating activities were supported in many countries in the region. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand, women were trained in silkworm raising, textile weaving, animal raising and establishing rice banks. Landless women in Bangladesh were assisted by the Grameen Bank. In Papua New Guinea, a survey on women's income-generating activities was conducted. In Viet Nam, support was given to embroidery, sewing and dressmaking.

18. Skills training activities were supported in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Cambodia and Papua New Guinea. In the Philippines, UNICEF supported training in new non-formal education methods for female functional literacy and leadership skills, and in Thailand in business skills.

19. Rural women in Bangladesh, Cambodia and Pakistan were provided with revolving loans. A major intersectoral initiative has been the focus on the girl child, especially in Bangladesh and Pakistan, while UNICEF has supported the Year of the Girl Child through workshops, seminars and the production of information and advocacy materials. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam, women's unions have played an important role in supporting intersectoral women's activities, and in Thailand, the girl child is the major target for primary health care and the safe motherhood project.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

20. By late 1990, the Convention had been ratified by Bangladesh, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines and Viet Nam. It had been signed by the Papua New Guinea, Republic of Korea, Samoa and Vanuatu.

21. The regional office supported the Government of Thailand in organizing a South-East Asia Meeting on the Rights of the Child in August 1990 at Bangkok. It was attended by representatives from 12 countries. The objectives of the meeting were to support the process of ratification at the national level, to plan for implementation and to identify useful regional networks for information and monitoring. The meeting concluded that the processes of ratification, implementation and monitoring of the Convention at the country level could be facilitated with improved access to information and technical advice and materials on the Convention. One of the recommendations was that a regional information network on the rights of the child should be established by the regional office to facilitate the exchange of experience and information.

Children in especially difficult circumstances

22. Working children, child abuse, child prostitution, street children and children affected by armed conflict are growing problems in many countries of the region. The media has raised public awareness of these programmes in Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand. Regional networks, supported by UNICEF, have made important contributions in raising awareness of these problems. This has enhanced support for activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and influenced official opinion. One UNICEF-supported NGO, Child Workers in Asia, publishes newsletters and pictorial booklets on the situation of working children.

Education and early childhood development

23. The World Conference on Education for All, held at Jomtien, Thailand, in March 1990, gave particular focus to education in the region and provided the opportunity for most countries to review their educational policies. One major outcome has been increased attention to female education. In 1990, Bangladesh approval legislation providing compulsory primary education, with free education for girls up to grade 8. In Thailand, a national plan of action has been prepared. In Pakistan, priority has been given to the basic learning needs of girls and women. In Bangladesh and Pakistan, emphasis has been placed on recruiting and training female primary school teachers.

24. Overall, primary school enrolments increased during 1990. In the Philippines, primary enrolment is now 99.5 per cent, and in Indonesia, 96 per cent. However, low female enrolment, absenteeism, high drop-out rates and poor teaching skills continue to create problems in many countries of the region. In Bangladesh, daily attendance averages only 50 per cent and even less during peak agricultural seasons. Of those children completing primary school, 10 per cent do not have basic reading and writing skills. In Myanmar, schools opened in May after a three-year disruption. Non-enrolment is estimated at 38 per cent and the drop-out rate at 80 per cent.

25. In many countries, UNICEF has supported the improvement and expansion of non-formal education. Functional literacy programmes, focusing on women and teenage girls and implemented by NGOs, are being supported in Bangladesh, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea and Viet Nam. Innovative approaches to girls' non-formal education have been established in Pakistan.

26. UNICEF continues to support improvements in the quality of education through curricula development, improved teacher training and development and the publication of school textbooks and primers. During 1990, curricula were reviewed in Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar. In Cambodia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, new curricula will include health education, agriculture and science. Support for the production of school textbooks increased in several countries. In Cambodia, 500,000 school textbooks were printed, and in Bangladesh, UNICEF supported the production of 17 million school texts and primers. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, UNICEF assisted with low-cost book production.

27. Early childhood development activities expanded in most countries in the region, with a growing focus on an integrated, multidisciplinary approach. In Viet Nam, demand was created for the further integration of nutrition and health into formal day-care centres. In Thailand, 1,110 women and village leaders were trained in multidisciplinary approaches to child care. In Cambodia, a pilot project was established to teach young children basic literacy and numeracy skills.

External relations

28. The year 1990 was an exceptionally busy period for advocacy in the region, with the World Conference on Education for All (hosted by the Royal Thai Government), the Task Force for Child Survival at Bangkok, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Summit for Children.

29. Advocacy for the Convention on the Rights of the Child was undertaken in every country of the region, and the regional office met the strong demand for information materials on the Convention. The State of the World's Children report continued to have a strong impact and several national versions of Facts for Life were launched during the year.

30. Alliances and contacts forged with parliamentarians in previous years proved valuable in mobilizing political support for the Convention and the World Summit for Children.

31. At the country level, ministers, senior officials and community gatherings focused on child survival, protection and development. In Bangladesh, the President formed an Interministerial Committee on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In Pakistan, writers, artists, media and community leaders held meetings to mobilize support for children and the Summit. In the Philippines, the President presided over a candlelight vigil at Manila. In Thailand, the Thai National Summit, presided over by the Prime Minister, was attended by over 500 persons representing government agencies, NGOs and key public figures.

C. Regional services

32. The regional office provides a broad range of support and advisory services to the country offices in the region, including support in planning, evaluation and monitoring; programme support; communications and training; external relations; supply operations; administration, personnel and finance; and health and nutrition advisory support services. The regional office is also the focal point for inter-agency cooperation and linkages with regional institutions. These activities were elaborated in previous reports and will be made available on request to interested Executive Board members.

II. CHINA

A. Recent developments

33. The eighth five-year development plan is to be launched in 1991. Premier Li Peng, reporting to the State Council on the nation's economy in July 1990, said that the eighth five-year plan should be within the framework of a 10-year programme; sustained and steady development should be pursued within available means; and the "deepening of reform" and opening the country to the outside world should continue. Agriculture was seen as a major priority and a breakthrough in agriculture and keeping the increase of grain production in line with population growth were considered important goals. The new plan is likely to provide a balanced approach embodying elements of both central planning and market mechanisms. No public statement has been made so far about goals and strategies in the social sectors.

34. According to the decennial population census conducted in 1990, population, spurred by a second generation baby-boom, stood at 1.13 billion - 22 per cent of the world's population and 36 per cent of Asia's. The census also indicated a national illiteracy rate of 16 per cent, which amounted to 180 million illiterates over 12 years old. When further results become available, current disaggregated data on the population, including child mortality and distribution of illiteracy, will be known.

B. Programme trends

35. The past year has seen the beginning of the fourth Government of China/UNICEF programme of cooperation for the period 1990-1994, which was approved by the Executive Board in April 1989 (E/ICEF/1989/P/L.14). In some cases, the elaboration of individual project plans and decisions regarding implementation methods and mechanisms demanded major efforts from UNICEF and government counterparts. Major global advocacy events - the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the World Conference on Education for All and the World Summit for Children - have been the additional focus of attention and effort in the past year.

36. A total early childhood development initiative is a means of achieving government goals: improving the outcome of pregnancies; improving young child care; and improved children's education. It also builds on the child survival efforts that have been successful in China over the past decade. The major aim of the initiative is to make parents, members of the family and community partners ensure that every young child below the age of six years, especially those in poor and remote areas, has access to essential services and can participate in affordable, community-based early child care and education activities, thus reducing the present disparity between opportunities for urban and rural children.